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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 5939

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINS, PINT, LE
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH ADEL OSSEIRAN, MINISTER OF JUSTICE, PUBLIC WORKS,

ECONOMY AND COMMERCE

1. SUMMARY. IN CLINICAL, DISPASSIONATE ANALYSIS OF EVENTS, OSSEIRAN PLACED MUCH OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR DETERIORATING SITUATION ON FRANGIE AND KARAME, AS WELL AS ON PALESTINIAN PRESENCE AND NEFARIOUS OUTSIDE INFLUENCES. HE SAID MANY CHRISTIANS WANT PARTITION, IN PARTICULAR CHAMOUN AND FRANGIE, AND THAT SEPARATE CHRISTIAN STATE COULD CONCEIVABLY BE VIABLE. WHILE OPPOSING PARTITION, HE BELIEVED CANTONIZATION MIGHT WORK UNDER CERTAIN CONDITIONS. OSSEIRAN CHARACTERIZED SARKIS AS EXCELLENT MAN FOR PRESIDENT. OSSEIRAN THOUGHT SYRIAN MILITARY PRESENCE AND FURTHER INTERVENTION MAY OFFER ONLY HOPE FOR CESSATION OF FIGHTING, ALTHOUGH HE IS CONCERNED THAT
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SYRIA HAS A GRAND DESIGN FOR CONFEDERATION. END SUMMARY.

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2. DURING ONE AND HALF HOUR MEETING ON JULY 6, WHICH RANGED OVER ALL ASPECTS OF THE LEBANESE SIT, OSSEIRAN'S ANALYSIS OF EVENTS WAS CLINICAL AND DISPASSIONATE--AND UNLIKE SAEBSALAM, XUMBLATT, AND EDDE, HE DID NOT VILIFY THE SYRIANS. NO DOUTOLAN IMPORTANT REASON FOR THIS IS THAT, AS A SHI'ITE (MOSLEM MINORITY), OSSEIRAN HAS A BETTER APPRECIATION FOR CHRISTIAN CONCERNS AND FOR THE SAME REASON IS LESS INCLINED TO TAKE THE MOSLEM HARD LINE.

3. IN RECAPITULATION OF INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS, OSSEIRAN PLACED MUCH OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR DETERIORATING SITUATION ON FRANGIE AND KARAME. FRANGIE HAD BEEN A WEAK LEADER WHO REFUSED TO EXERCISE HIS AUTHORITY. AT THE OUTSET OF FRANGIE'S TERM AS PRESIDENT, HE, OSSEIRAN, HAD URGED FRANGIE TO MAKE A STRONG MOVE AT THE OUTSET TO DEMONSTRATE HIS AUTHORITY, SUCH, FOR EXAMPLE, AS EXECUTING CRIMINALS WHO HAD BEEN CONDEMNED TO DEATH BY THE COURTS OVER THE YEARS BUT WHOSE SENTENCE NO PRESIDENT HAD HAD THE GUTS TO CARRY OUT. FRANGIE SHOULD HAVE RESIGNED LONG TIME AGO AND MIGHT HAVE, HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THE MALICIOUS INFLUENCE OF CHAMOUN. OSSEIRAN ALSO BERATED FRANGIE AND KARAME FOR BEING SOFT ON THE PALESTINIANS. IN THE FACE OF GROWING PALESTINIAN STRENGTH, KARAME, AS MINISTER OF DEFENSE, HAD HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD UP THE ARMY INTO A FORCE ADEQUATE TO MAINTAIN SECURITY IN THE COUNTRY. HE DID NOT DO SO, HOWEVER, CLAIMING THAT NO LEBANESE ARMY COULD ACT EFFECTIVELY IN VIEW OF ITS INHERENT PARTIALITY TO CHRISTIANS. OSSEIRAN DISAGREED WITH THIS ASSUMPTION. HE SAID THAT WHILE SOME ELEMENTS IN THE ARMY TENDED TO FAVOR THE CHRISTIANS, ON THE WHOLE THE ARMY WOULD HAVE ACTED TOGETHER IN LEBANON'S BROAD INTERESTS.

4. OSSEIRAN LABELED PRESIDENT-ELECT SARKIS A GOOD MAN, LEVEL-HEADED AND INTELLIGENT, HE HAD ALSO HAD CONSIDERABLE ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE AS JAMIL CHEHAB'S NUMBER TWO. HE DOES NOT AT ALL SHARE VIEW EXPRESSED BY EDDE AND SALAM THAT SARKIS' LACK OF POLITICAL FOLLOWING IS A LIABILITY. ON CONTRARY, HE SAW THIS AS ASSET. SARKIS COULD BE A STATESMAN RATHER THAN JUST A POLITICIAN. OSSEIRAN OBSERVED THAT EVEN IF FRANGIE RESIGNED NOW--WHICH HE FAVORED--SARKIS CLD NOT RPT NOT EFFECTIVELY RULE WITHOUT ANY ARMY AND APPARATUS OF GOVT. OSSEIRAN COMMENTED PARENTHETICALLY THAT FEBRUARY 14 "BAABDA (REFORM) DOCUMENT" NEGOTITED BY SYRIANS REALLY OFFERED LITTLE THAT WAS NEW. IF LEBANESE LAWS HAD CONFIDENTIAL

BEEN FOLLOWED, THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN NO NEED FOR SUCH A DOCUMENT.

5. OSSEIRAN COMMENTED THAT MANY CHRISTIANS WANT PARTITION, INCLUDING IN PARTICULAR CHAMOUN AND FRANGIE. THE DIFFERENCE IS THAT CHAMOUN MAKES NO BONES ABOUT WANTING PARTITION, WHEREAS FRANGIE PRETENDS HE DISFAVORS IT. GEMAYEL, WHO HAS BEEN BOUGHT OFF BY THE SYRIANS, OPPOSES PARTITION, ALTHOUGH HE USED TO SUPPORT THE CONCEPT.

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6. WHILE OPPOSING PARTITION, OSSEIRAN EXPRESSED VIEW THAT SOME FORM OF CANTONIZATION MIGHT BE WORKABLE. IT WOULD MEET THE CHRISTIANS' DESIRE TO RETAIN THEIR OWN IDENTITY, BUT CANTONIZATION SHOULD NOT BE PERMITTED UNLES THE ECONOMIES ARE UNIFIED, THERE IS ONE CENTRAL PARLIAMENT ANDD ONE ARMY.

7. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTION RE VIABILITY OF A SEPARATE CHRISTIAN ST N
UZOSSEIRAN SAID THAT AFTER TEN YEARS SUCH A STATE COULD DEVELOP ITS INFRASTRUCTURE TO POINT WHERE IT COULD BECOME VIABLE--AND RECREATE THE FREEWHEELING LEBANON OF OLD. A CHRISTIAN STATE BETWEEN JOUNIE AND TRIPOLI COULD ONEC AGAIN BECOME A MECCA FOR TOURISM, THE COLCE VITA LIFE AND AN OPEN TOQIETY. ALL ARABS, HE SAID, ARE PARTIAL TO WOMEN AND WHISKEY, AND IT IS ONLY IN A CHRISTIAN ENCLAVE THAT THEY CAN SATISFY THEIR INSATIABLE APPETITES. IN THE INTERIM, WHILE DEVELOPING ITS INFRASTRUCTURE, A PARTITIONED CHRISTIAN STATE COULD PROBABLY SURVIVE WITH HELP OF OUTSIDE SUPPORT.

8. OSSEIRAN DID NOT PLACE ALL THE BLAME FOR LEBANON'S PLIGHT ON THE SHORTCOMINGS OF ITS LEADERS. HE SAID THERRE HAD BEEN MANY NEFARIOUS OUTSIDE INFLUENCES AND, OF COURSE, THE PALESTINIAN PRESENCE HED SET THE WHOLE THING OFF. PALESTINIANS HAD TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF PROPENSITY OF MOSLEM LEADRRS TO TAKE UP WITH THEM AND HAD BEEN ENABLED TO CREATE A STATE WHITHIN A STATE. IF LEBANESE GOVT IN 1969 HAD FIRMLY IMPLEMENTED CAIRO ACCORD, FORCING PALESTIANKANS IN LEBANON TO ABANDON THEIR FRREEWHEELING ACTIVITIES, LEBANAON TODAY WLD BE FAR BEETTER OFF. NOW IT IS TOO LATE TO GO BACK TO CAIRO ACCORD BECAUSE PALESTINIANS WILL NO LONGER ACCEPT IT. WHAT THEY WANT IS FREEDOM TO DO WHAT THEY PLEASE IN LEBANON. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION, HE SAID PERHAPS SOME PALESTINIANS, BUT NOT A MAJORITY, WOULD LIKE A POLITICAL ROLE IN LEBANON.

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9. OSSEIRAN SAID THAT REASON WHY SAEB SALAM AND RAYMOND ERR ZWRE SO BITTERLY ANTI-SYRIAN IS BECAUSE SYRIA SUPPORTED SARKIS RATHER THAN EDDE IN LAST ELECTION. FUNDAMENTALLY, CONTINUED OSSEIRAN, SYRIANS ENTERED LEBANON FOR PURPOSE OF PRESERVING STABILITY AND ASSURING FRIENDLY REGIME. AT SAME TIME, OSSEIRAN EXPRESSED VIEW THAT SYRIA HAS A GRAND DESIGN BASED ON "GREATER SYRIA" CONCEPT. THIS IS TO PRODUCE A CONFEDERATION WHICH WOULD INCLUDE LEBANON, SYRIA AND TRANS-JORDAN. THIS IS PRINCIPAL REASON WHY ASSAD WANTS TO KEEP PALESTINIANS FROM DOMINATING LEBANON AND WHY HE HAS THROWN HIS WEIGHT BEHAND CHRISTIANS.

10. WHEN I SUGGESTED THAT CHRISTIANS WOULD NOT LIKELY BE PLEASED TO BE A PART OF A GREATER SYRIA SINCE THEIR MINORITY STATUS WOULD BE ACCENTUATED, OSSEIRAN OBSERVED THAT CHRISTIANS HAVE LONG BEEN MINORITIES IN MONSLEM LANDS BUT HAVE BEEN WELL TREATED. HE THOUGHT

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THAT LEBANESE CHRISTIANS WOULD BENEFIT FROM BEING PART OF SUCH A POLITICAL ENTITY, ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT ELABORATE.

11. OSSEIRAN WAS VERY SKEPTICAL THAT ARAB LEAGUE MEDIATORS COULD SUCCEED BECAUSE, HE SAID, WHAT LEBANON NEEDS IS AN IMPOSED SOLUTION. WHEN I ASKED WHO SHOULD IMPOSE IT, HE SAID HE DID NOT KNOW. SYRIA? "WHY NOT?" HE REPLIED. THIS WOULD BE BETTER, HE CONTINUED, THAN ALLOWING THINGS TO CONTINUE AS THEY ARE, EVEN THOUGH HE POINTED TO DANGER THAT ONCE SYRIANS OCCUPIED ALL LEBANON IT WLD BE DIFFICULT TO GET THEM OUT. AT MINIMUM THEY MIGHT WANT TO HOLD ONTO THE BEKAA AND THE HERMEL AREA TO THE NORTH.

12. WHEN QUESTIONED ABOUT ARAB LEAGUE FORCE, OSSEIRAN SAID THE IDEA IS A GOOD ONE BUT PRESENT FORCE IS INEFFECTUAL. WHAT IS NEEDED IS AN ARAB LEAGUE FORCE WITH A STRONG LEADER AND A MISSION TO STOP THE FIGHTING AT ALL COSTS. THEY MUST COME IN AND ISSUE AN ULTIMATUM THAT EITHER THE FIGHTERS LAY DOWN THEIR ARMS OR ELSE. I ASKED WHETHER HE WAS NOT EXPECTING TOO MUCH. HE SAID HE WAS TALKING ABOUT WHAT IS NEEDED, NOT NECESSARILY WHAT IS LIKELY TO HAPPEN.

13. COMMENT. THUS FAR, I HAVE FOUND OSSEIRAN AND KARAME MORE REALISTIC AND DISPASSIONATE IN THEIR ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION THAN SALAM, JUMBLATT AND EDDE. ALSO, OSSEIRAN SEEMS TO HAVE NO AXE TO GRIND. AN ELDER--IF NOT INFLUENTIAL OR TERRIBLY EFFECTIVE--STATESMAN, HE SEEMS ABLE TO SIT BACK AND TAKE MORE OBJECTIVE LOOK AT DEVELOPMENTS. POSSIBIS EXCEPTION IS HIS THESIS THAT ASSAD SEEKS TO
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MAKE LEBANON PART OF A GREATER SYRIA, INCLUDING TRANS-JORDAN. I DEFER TO AMBASSADOR MURPHY. BUT HIS SUGGESTION THAT SYRIANS ARE PROBABLY ONLY ONES WHO CAN POSSIBLY BRING A STOP TO THIS FIGHTING RINGS TRUE. FLICKER OF HOPE YESTERDAY THAT ARAB LEAGUE MEDIATION TEAM MIGHT BE GETTING WOMEWHERE HAS BEEN DASHED BY INTENSIFICATION OF FIGHTING AROUND CHEKKA. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, IT IS HARD TO DISAGREE WITH OSSAIRAN THAT ONLY WAY TO STOP FIGHTING WOULD BE A DETERMINED AND HEAVY-HANDED SYRIAN MILIARY INTERVENTION INTO BEIRUT. WHETHER SYRIA IS WILLING TO PAY THE COST, BOTH IN TERMS OF BLOOD SPILT AND WIDESPREAD ARAB CONDEMNATION , IS A MOOT QUESTION.
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